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From the Editor

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From the Editor

I admit that I was surprised when I first noticed Norman Wirzba in his magnificent book, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age* (Oxford, 2003), using the word *vocation* to connect human ecological practices to the nature and role of God in the created world. Doesn't *vocation* largely designate professional or at least interpersonal and "societal" work—even after Luther released it from the domain of professional churchmen? Can *vocation* be stretched to cover our work in and for the *natural* world?

I had confused the center with periphery—the heart of vocation with its encasing skeleton. As Wirzba gently reminds us, care for the earth and especially its soil (*adamah*) was the vocation given to *Adam* (Gen. 2:15), and remains the quintessential vocation of us all (Wirzba 22, 31). Such care must itself be "grounded." It is not firstly by developing eco-industries or by using food for fuel but by *gardening* that we take up our authentic vocation (118). Just as God creates and redeems by "making room" for the flourishing of Creation, so too humanity is called to the hospitality of "welcoming and enabling the whole of creation to share in the peace and joy of the divine life" (21).

Martin Luther wrote, preached, and taught largely with the aim of reversing the gnostic flight of Christians from the world. He sought to ground us, as it were, in the earth that is created and loved by God. "Vocation" is but one way of naming the heart of this incarnational and creation-centric theology. Moreover, Luther's primary way of describing God's Incarnation and Christian discipleship was through *kenosis* or self-withdrawal: Humans, like God, make room for others so that they, too, might enjoy fullness of life. More radical still, we often come to learn the scope and shape of such self-emptying hospitality from those we

think *we* are serving—including good Samaritans and perhaps now nature itself. Topsoil, in the words of Wendell Berry, "is very Christlike in its passivity and beneficence, and in the penetrating energy that issues out of its peaceableness" (quoted in Wirzba 22). In other words, we might learn how to care for nature by attending to its care for us.

As Jim Martin-Schramm and Cynthia Moe-Lobeda acknowledge in this issue, Lutherans and the faculty, administrators, and staff who work at Lutheran colleges and universities have no absolutely *unique* perspectives on the vocation of caring for creation. But it would seem that we do bring quite a lot. Do our deeply grounded Lutheran identities support and sustain our more recent, and sometimes frantic, environmental concerns and efforts? If so, how might we name, celebrate, and further cultivate that theological spring? If not, could the rising danger of depleting and devastating the natural world prompt us to reexamine our religious roots, asking again what difference it makes that we called to serve through *Lutheran* higher education?

Besides four feature essays that think through sustainability, creation, and Lutheran higher ed, this issue of *Intersections* includes interviews with four leaders of environmental initiatives on our campuses, as well as a report about the vocation of our alumni. Each of the authors first presented his/her ideas at the 2012 Vocation of a Lutheran College Conference at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, Minnesota. I hope that the entire issue helps sustain a conversation that involves many voices, especially the groaning of earth our home.

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